

LOVE AND HATE

by Ray C. Stedman

In our study we are now looking at the words our Lord spoke to his disciples as they left the Upper Room and made their way across the Kidron valley and through the hillside vineyards into the shadows of Gethsemane's garden. In Chapter 15 we have his assessment of the three major priorities of life. All of us are concerned about priorities, about what comes first, what to do next, etc., and this passage sets forth, in order, the basic, fundamental priorities of life.

First, above all else, in Verses 1 through 11 of Chapter 15 you have the Christian's relationship to the Lord. That is of supreme importance. If this area is hurting in your life, stop everything else you are doing and get it straightened out! Because if you go on in that condition you are going to hurt not only yourself but others as well. It is so important that you maintain this relationship, which our Lord puts in the simple words, "Abide in me, and I in you" {John 15:4a} -- that basic, fundamental identity of the believer. "Abide in me, stay in me, and let me stay in you"; everything else will flow from that.

The second and third priorities of life are found in the remainder of the chapter and the first four verses of Chapter 16. The second is our relationship to other believers. That is expressed in the words, "Love one another." The third is the relationship we have to the world outside -- a world which hates and persecutes, and yet toward which the attitude of the Christian is to be, as we shall see, one of patient witness. Regarding our relationship to other believers Jesus said,

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. This I command you, to love one another." {John 15:12-17 RSV}

Notice that this paragraph begins and ends with the command of Jesus, "I command you to love one another." The fact that this is put in the imperative mode means it is not an option in our life. It is not something we do if we feel like it. It is not an occasional action on our part. It is to be a deliberate response to another person whom we know to be in the family of God, regardless of how we feel toward that person.

Many people struggle at this point. They say, "How can you command love? Love is a feeling, and if you don't love somebody you can't help it. How can anyone command another to love someone he doesn't love, or to stop loving someone he does? Love is our master; we do not master it." Those who speak in this way reveal a very serious misconception of love. Unfortunately we are victims of Hollywood in this respect. We think of love as a feeling we have of affection toward another, sometimes a very sentimental, romantic feeling.

But love, as Jesus employs it here, is far different. We can be sure of one thing: He would never command us to do what is impossible for us to do. The secret, of course, is that we are to love, he says, "as I have loved you." This kind of love is to arise out of the same kind of relationship that he had with the Father and that made it possible for him to love us. In this same manner, and from the same source, we are to love one another with the same quality of love. He loved us because God is love, and he was indwelt by the Father. He was in the Father, and the Father in him. As he yielded to that relationship, love flowed out. It could not help it -- God is love. We are to love one another because we are in the Son, and the Son in us. Since God is love, as we yield to that relationship to the Son, love flows from us. And it will have the qualities that his love had.

He goes on to define for us three aspects of love which mark the quality of his love for us, and which we also are to show to one another:

The first is given in the words, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Love lays down its life for another. We all know how fully Jesus himself exemplified this. He laid down his life for us. This, he said, is the greatest love that anyone can demonstrate toward his friends. Some have said, "Wouldn't it be a greater love to love your enemies?" In his letter to the Romans, Paul tells us that God's love was of such quality that he loved us even when we were enemies. It is true, that is a greater kind of love. But here our Lord is talking about what you can do for your friends. You can show no greater love for your friends than to lay down you life for them.

Obviously this means more than simply dying physically for them. If it meant only that, there would be very few of us who could or would ever fulfill this, largely because we would lack the opportunity to do so. And of course one could do so only once! But our Lord is commanding us to do this repeatedly. So he means by this that we are to give ourselves up for one another. That is what laying down our life means -- giving something of ourselves to another. When you go out of your way to meet a friend's need, when you are willing to spend time with someone who is a Christian just because he is a Christian, not necessarily because you are drawn to him, and you are willing to go out of your way and to give yourself up for him, you are laying down your life, a part of it at least, for that person. This is what Jesus had in mind. We are to lay down our lives, to love one another in that sense.

Just this morning I ran across a study one of our interns has made on the words *one another* in the New Testament. It was so pertinent that I would like to share it with you. It gathers up, both negatively and positively, all the teaching of the New Testament on our relationship one to another in the family of God. Negatively the New Testament says,

- Don't challenge one another.
- Don't complain against one another.
- Don't devour one another.
- Don't envy one another.
- Don't judge one another.
- Don't lie to one another.
- Don't speak against one another.

And positively it says,

- Accept one another.
- Admonish one another.
- Bear one another's burdens.
- Bear with one another.
- Build up one another.
- Care for one another.
- Comfort one another.
- Confess your sins to one another.
- Encourage one another.
- Fellowship with one another.
- Forgive one another.
- Greet one another.
- Honor one another.
- Be hospitable toward each other.
- Humble yourself toward one another.
- Be kind to one another.
- Love one another.
- Be members one of another.
- Pray for one another.

Be at peace with one another.
Have the same mind toward one another.
Seek after that which is good for one another.
Serve one another.
Show forbearance to one another.
Stimulate one another.
Be subject to one another.
Teach one another.
Be tenderhearted one toward another.

What a full range of relationships our Lord has caught up in this command that we are to love one another, even to the extent of laying down our lives -- giving up our own comforts -- for one another!

The second mark of his kind of love is that it shares its secrets:

"No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you." {John 15:15 RSV}

This is a remarkable statement. In the sense that he shares with them his life and the secrets of his innermost heart, they have become his friends. Now, this is not the only relationship believers have with the Lord. They remain his servants, and a little later he refers to them as such: "The servant is not greater than his master," {John 15:20b RSV}. But in this sense we are friends of Jesus.

What do you do with a friend? The first mark of friendship is sharing. You tell him secrets and share opportunities with him. If you get a hot tip on the stock market you call your friend up -- so he can buy first and see if it's any good! If you run into a bargain at a department store you share the news with a friend. If you have an opportunity to enjoy some unusual experience you call up your friend. Friendship is always marked by the sharing of intimacy.

Our Lord says that he has shared the secrets of his life with his disciples -- and with us. He tells them what the Father had told him about life, about death, about hell, about heaven, about relationships one with another, about history, about the world. He poured it all out, told them what he had known, what he had learned from the Father. This is the mark and characteristic of love.

In other words, he is talking about what here at PBC we have learned to call "body life." We are to love one another in the same way Jesus loved us. As he told his disciples what he had learned, so we are to share with one another what we have learned -- our struggles, our fears, our hopes, our experiences, all that God has taught us by what we have gone through. If church is nothing more than a crowd of people coming together and listening to a speaker then it is no different from a convention or a conference on some secular theme. What makes it different is that we share our lives with one another. There is the unfolding of secrets, the bearing of burdens, telling of one another's needs, touching of one another's lives. This is what it means to love one another.

Some time ago I culled this from a church bulletin:

You ever feel like a frog? Frogs feel slow, low, ugly, puffy, drooped, pooped. I know -- one told me. The frog feeling comes when you want to be bright but feel dumb, when you want to share but are selfish, when you want to be thankful but feel resentment, when you want to be great but are small, when you want to care but are indifferent. Yes, at one time or another each of us has found himself on a lily pad, floating down the great river of life. Frightened and disgusted, we're too froggish to budge.

Once upon a time there was a frog, only he really wasn't a frog -- he was a prince who looked and felt like a frog. A wicked witch had cast a spell on him. Only the kiss of a beautiful maiden could save him. But since when do cute chicks kiss frogs? So there he sat, unloved prince in frog form. But miracles happen. One day a beautiful maiden gathered him up and gave him a great big smack. Crash! Boom! Zap! There he was, a handsome prince. And you know the rest -- they lived happily ever after.

So what is the task of the church? Kissing frogs, of course!

That is what Jesus is saying to us, isn't it? "Love one another."

The last element of this love is defined as the bearing of fruit in one another's lives through prayer:

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you." {John 15:16 RSV}

As you put this all together you see that the mark of love he is talking about is the bearing of fruit by means of prayer. The context is still the example of love which he set. This is what he did -- he prayed for his own. He will pray for them again, as recorded in the seventeenth chapter, and thus bear fruit in their lives. The fruit in view here is, as we have seen all along, Christlikeness. It is the character of Jesus, the compassion, the gentleness, the tenderness, the forgiving quality, the courage, the strength, the beauty, the grace of his life. This is what we are to bear, not only in our own lives but in one another's lives, by means of prayer. As we pray for one another we help each other bear the fruit of Christlikeness.

This is why the epistles remind us to pray for all saints, to make supplication for one another, to pray for one another. This is the means by which we love one another. And this is our Lord's command. We are not to treat each other with disdain or with separation but are to reach out in this way toward one another.

At a Christian gathering the other day I heard someone, speaking of another, say, "I can't stand that person, and I don't want anything to do with her!" That is a violation of our Lord's command to love one another.

Love means to give yourself for another, to give of your life and strength and time for another. Love means to share with and teach one another what you have learned. And love means to pray for one another. John tells us that "if any man says, 'I love God,' but hates his brother, he is a liar," {1 Jn 4:20 RSV}. If we love God, we are also to love one another. This is the great command which makes the difference between the church, as a community of those who love each other, and the world around us, which essentially neglects and is indifferent to one another. This is what makes the Christian witness, as we will see a little later.

In the next section our Lord goes on to point out the priority and the relationship of the Christian with regard to the world around him. He begins with the attitude of the world toward the Christian:

"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." {John 15:18-19 RSV}

It is remarkable that our Lord moves quickly from his words about love for one another to this word about the hatred of the world toward the Christian. The world, as our Lord is using the term, refers to secular society. It is not humanity. Humanity does not hate the church; it is the world which hates the church, and the Lord of the church. The world is organized society, without God, but with its own morals and standards and value systems. It is what we ordinarily call "the system," and it is what hates the believer and wants nothing to do with him.

The world, as our Lord says, both hates and loves. It loves what conforms to it; it hates what differs with it. We have all experienced this. We know that even in small, nonreligious matters the world can hate anything which does not conform to it. I read the other day that the man who invented the umbrella was pelted with rotten eggs and vegetables and stones when he first tried it out on a public street. No one else had one, you see. So the world loves to destroy that which does not fit its pattern.

This is why the Scriptures urge us to not be conformed to the world around us: Do not let the world squeeze you into its own mold -- for it desperately dislikes anything which differs with it, and will try to change it. If we do conform to the world, if the church is worldly (and this does not mean doing certain things so much as it means having certain attitudes), if the church trusts in its own power and seeks for prestige and status, and

acts as though God does not add anything to it, then the world loves the church. It will pat it on the back and praise it and exalt it. But it dislikes and hates and stands against any church which is true to its Lord.

Our Lord points out that not only will the world hate, but it will persecute the church:

"Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than His master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also." {John 15:20 RSV}

Not only does the world hate the believer, but it also actively acts to get rid of Christian faith, Christian teaching, and even Christians. This has been demonstrated all through history. It may surprise some of you to know that, among all the twenty centuries since our Lord was here, the century which has seen more outright, vicious, violent persecution of Christians is not the 1st but the 20th. More Christians are being hated and destroyed, their goods and homes confiscated, their persons attacked and mistreated, in this century than in any other century. We think immediately of those in Russia and other Communist countries. Communism always hates Christianity, and those who stand for it and are committed teachers of it are always first on the list for destruction whenever a Communist government takes over.

Nevertheless, Jesus says, some will receive: "If they kept my word, they will keep yours also." This is the encouragement to the witness of the church -- that not all will hate, not all will persecute. Some will receive, some will believe, some will give heed and respond, as they did with Jesus. From these words we can understand that the church need never expect to win the masses of people to Christ. Jesus didn't. Even the tremendous witness he gave to the nation in his day did not win the majority to himself. The witness of the church will have the same effect.

Our Lord goes on to give us the reasons for the world's attitude. He sets out the first in Verse 21:

"But all this they will do to you on my account, because they do not know him who sent me." {John 15:21 RSV}

The first reason for the attitude of hatred and persecution is that of ignorance. The world does not know God. It does not understand him. It thinks of him in a way which is distorted and twisted. It thinks of him as an arbitrary ruler, a huge judge or policeman -- if it thinks of him at all. It does not know his compassion, his forgiveness, his tenderness, his patience, his willingness to work with the slightest response. So the world, in ignorance, persecutes God. Jesus describes this very ignorance in Verse 2 of Chapter 16:

"They will put you out of the synagogues; indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God." {John 16:2 RSV}

That is how blind they are. They actually think that in doing this they are worshipping God, for that is what the words "offering service" mean. They think they are worshipping God by persecuting and killing Christians. This was true during the early days of Christian persecution, during the days of the Inquisition, and it is still true today in many many ways and forms. Of course, there is no greater example than Saul of Tarsus, that brilliant young Pharisee who was burning with threats and hatred in his heart toward the early Christians. He persecuted them and thought he was actually serving God, pleasing God in this way. Later on when he became Paul the apostle he tells us, "I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief," {1 Tim 1:13 KJV}.

We Christians need constantly to bear in mind how ignorant the world is. It does not know truth. It thinks it does. It talks as though it knew great and startling truth. But when it comes right down to a confrontation with the truth as it is in Jesus, the world is abysmally ignorant and does not understand itself or life or anything about it. That is why it persecutes.

But there is a second reason, and Jesus goes on to point out the deliberate rejection which persists even when ignorance has been taken care of:

"If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among

them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. It is to fulfil the word that is written in their law, 'They hated me without a cause.'" {John 15:22-25 RSV}

Now ignorance has been met; the light has come. As John says in the early part of his gospel, "This is the judgment, that light has come into the world, and men still loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil," {cf, John 3:19}. Knowing the truth, they rejected it. This is further evidence of the enmity of the world. Jesus came and spoke words of truth; he came and did deeds of love. What he said revealed the way things really are, took away the veils and illusions, and revealed truth, reality. What he did revealed the love of the Father, the kindness, the compassion, the healing ability, the qualities of God. But as people saw his works and heard his words, as we know, they rejected them, and this resulted in increasing hatred and violence, culminating at last in the crucifixion, in their nailing him to a cross. And, as he said, there is no excuse: "They hated him without a cause."

What is to be the attitude of the Christian to this kind of a world in which we still live? Our Lord's answer is found in Verses 26-27:

"But when the Counselor [the Comforter, the Strengtheners] comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning." {John 15:26-27 RSV}

Obviously the primary reference here is to the apostles themselves, for they were with him from the beginning, but it also applies to us. He says, "When the Spirit of God has come, you will bear witness to this world." The world is not to be left in its hopeless rejection of Christ -- even though it has resisted and rejected truth when it knew it to be truth.

We have all been part of this, haven't we? Every one of us has done this. Still, God does not abandon us. Isn't that amazing? Even when he would be fully justified in turning his back and walking away and leaving us all to our own consequences, he does not do so. He continues to bear a witness before the world.

So the Christian is not to retaliate, not to resent the hatred and persecution of the world, not to be vindictive and to return evil for evil. Rather, we are exhorted to return good for evil. Nor are we to retire from the world, to withdraw from it and build a Christian ghetto in which to hide ourselves, and then to throw tracts across the chasm! Rather, we are to move into the world, live in its midst just as Jesus did, and bear witness to the truth even though it is often rejected. We are to do this for the sake of those who will receive, who will believe, will accept the Word. We are to bear witness in the midst of the world.

This witness is two-fold. Primarily it is the witness of the Holy Spirit. He does what no man can do. The Spirit of God opens hearts, removes blindness, opens minds to understand. He bears witness that a word is true, gives it a ring of authenticity, so that power in witnessing rests with the Spirit, not with us. But we are to bear witness too. As Jesus indicates here, we are to bear witness as the apostles did -- as to what they saw and heard, what they themselves experienced. That is where every Christian stands. Just before his ascension Jesus said, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses of me," {Acts 1:8a RSV}. We are all to be witnesses of

- What Jesus has been to us,
- What we have experienced,
- What has happened in our lives,
- What he has done for us.

And the Holy Spirit will witness with that, using those words, simple as they may be, to open minds and to break through hard hearts, to pierce and break down barriers, and to open people up to the Word. Thus the business of the church is to witness before a hating world.

Our Lord closes this section with his reason for teaching along this line, Chapter 16:

"I have said all this to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues; indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do this because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you of them." {John 16:1-4a RSV}

He does not want his disciples to be taken by surprise. If we run into mistreatment, if our witness is rejected, if we are persecuted or hated or ostracized, or treated with disdain or scorn by the world, we are to understand that this was predicted. It is part of the course, a natural event. It is not, therefore, to be surprising. Peter tells us that, remember? "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you," {1 Pet 4:12 RSV}. It is not strange, it is part of the process. "A man's foes will even be those of his own household," {Matt 10:36 RSV}. They will be your enemies, they will bear false witness against you. They will turn against you, sometimes when you least expect it.

"But," Jesus says, "do not be surprised. This is the enmity we are up against, the warfare in which we are engaged. Do not be surprised, but remember that I told you in advance because you are my friends, and I keep no secrets from you." He brings us again to the remembrance of the intimacy of relationship we have with him, and of the fact that we are to witness on the basis of the power which we are provided by abiding in him, and are to support that witness by the manifestation of a spirit of loving acceptance toward one another which tenderly cares for one another, shares with one another, prays for one another. Thus the world is confronted with a testimony it cannot gainsay, a character it cannot deny, which will either turn men in bitterness against God, or draw them by the Spirit to him.

This is the work of the church today. May God help us as we seek to fulfill it in this 20th century hour!

Prayer

Father, how many times have we sung those words, "Faith of our fathers, holy faith; we will be true to Thee till death." Lord, we pray that you will keep us in the midst of this unbelieving, rejecting world, and will help us to rejoice as we have the privilege of bearing witness to a crucified Savior. Let us do, Lord, as Jesus himself told us to do: "Rejoice and give thanks when men revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake." Lord, we ask that you will strengthen us and help us to reach out in love, one toward another, and to the weary world around us in their blindness and ignorance, so that we may bear witness of Jesus Christ, our true and loving Lord. We ask in his name, Amen.

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